



County of Fairfax, Virginia

Health Care Advisory Board

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 19, 2012

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Marlene W. Blum, Chairman
Health Care Advisory Board (HCAB)

SUBJECT: Inova Translational Medicine Institute

At the May 14, 2012 Health Care Advisory Board (HCAB) meeting, Dr. John Niederhuber presented information on the Inova Translational Medicine Institute (ITMI), with emphasis on its mission, its work, and its future development. This presentation had been scheduled as one of several regular Inova briefings for the HCAB on new programs and services.

Dr. Niederhuber's presentation was thorough and substantive, and he was very willing to discuss the issues and answer the HCAB's questions. He spoke about the current state of translational medicine and about its future benefits to individuals, the community, and entire populations.

During the discussion, HCAB members cited the decision by the Board of Supervisors to partner with Inova by investing \$11 million, spread over multiple years, in the ITMI, with no budget implications until Fiscal Year 2015, and asked Dr. Niederhuber why the funding was needed and what it would be used for. Both he and Jennifer Siciliano, Inova Vice President for Government Relations, responded that the County funding was aimed at supporting the ITMI because of the potential economic development opportunities it would generate. They argued that the County would benefit from the jobs and enterprises that will spin off from ITMI.

HCAB members expressed the following concerns about the program in relation to future County funding:

- Genetic testing, genomic sequencing, and the new pharmaceuticals developed through this research are very expensive. Furthermore, private insurance plans and Medicare currently do not cover most of these medical expenses. Currently, and for the time being, only those who can afford the out-of-pocket costs can take advantage of these advances. While it has been predicted that the costs will come down and that insurance will eventually pay for them, the future for widespread benefits is uncertain.
- While translational medicine has strong potential, it is also a risky business, and the promised economic development may be difficult to realize. Will Inova, a newcomer in research, be able to compete successfully for such development with other nearby regional institutions and jurisdictions already world renowned in bio-medical research?

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While we understand the Board's interest in this project, we urge caution in investing a significant amount of County funding in ITMI. Even scientists who are strong proponents of this research have emphasized that "translation of basic biomedical research into safe and effective clinical applications remains a slow, expensive, and failure-prone endeavor." [Francis S. Collins, "Reengineering Translational Science: The Time is Right," Science Magazine, July 6, 2011]

The HCAB believes that spending millions of County taxpayer dollars in support of the ITMI is problematic at this time. Should the Board believe otherwise, however, we recommend the following steps to ensure those dollars are spent wisely and appropriately:

- Before committing County funding for this project, the Board should thoroughly review the ITMI's feasibility and develop a plan to hold Inova accountable for the Institute's stated goal of economic development. The Board should make its expectations and its goals for economic development generated by the ITMI very clear. County funding should be conditional on the achievement of measurable objectives for bio-medical and bio-technical development attributable to the work of the ITMI (e.g., number of new jobs, number of new marketable businesses), with a timetable for accomplishing these objectives. Furthermore, knowledgeable and expert community members should be asked to participate in the development of goals, key measurements, and milestones.
- Inova should be required to provide some shorter term benefits to the community in return for the annual contributions that would begin in FY 2015. These benefits could be related directly to ITMI services (e.g., funding genetic testing and pharmaceuticals for those who cannot afford out-of-pocket costs). Alternatively, the County funding could be used to leverage funding for needed health services that Inova is currently identifying through its required Health Care Reform community health assessment.

If the Board has questions about this report and recommendations, please contact the HCAB.

cc: Ed Long, County Executive
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